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**TESTIMONY ON HB0096 - POSITION: Favorable**  
**Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)**

**TO:** Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Casey Wade

**OPENING: My name is Casey Wade. I am a resident of District 14. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0096 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction.**

My background is in education and I specifically work in helping schools become eligible to receive Title IV funding which helps students all across the country fund their education. Additionally, I am a Jewish woman who is passionate about social justice and feel called to participate in the Jewish concept of tikkun olam or repair of the world. This passion for social justice led me to work with at-risk youth from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances through the Upward Bound program. My time with these students was a life-changing experience and opened my eyes to the hardships that many teens face.

During my time with Upward Bound, I worked closely with students who were considered “at-risk.” I quickly learned this term meant many things. At risk of abuse, homelessness, violence, self-harm, drugs, bullying, and failing to graduate to name just a few. The backgrounds of some of the youth I worked with were heartbreaking and more than any child should have to bear. While I worked with the program, I was assigned to help come up with age-appropriate discipline when students broke the rules of the program. Something I learned quickly was that youth who are experiencing trauma in their lives often act out in a myriad of ways. Meeting this behavior with harsh punishment often did not yield an end to the behavior. However, meeting these teens with compassion, empathy, and techniques that were age appropriate more often than not yielded success in ending inappropriate behavior.

Harsh discipline makes little sense for teenagers whose brains are still developing. We as a society have a responsibility to protect our youth. Allowing the practice of “auto-charge” to continue forward fails to look at the unique experience of our youth and punish broadly without discretion or age appropriate methods. This practice is the most harmful to black and brown communities in Maryland. Charging children as adults sets them up for failure by giving them a record that impedes their ability to integrate back into society all before they are even legally an adult. When children are charged as adults, they lose access to the many services that

are available to youth when charged as minors.

By eliminating auto-charge, we allow discretion to be used when charging youths. We give adolescents the chance to be rehabilitated and to not have a record that will impede their opportunities for education and gainful employment. By ending auto-charge, we end a practice that hurts our minority communities. For these reasons, I fully support HB0096. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0096.**